



BOARD BRIEFS FOR DECEMBER 19, 2024

At its monthly meeting on Thursday, December 19, the MRH Board of Education discussed potential edits to the Budget Directive for the coming fiscal year (FY26). The Budget Directive is a statement which provides a structured framework for planning expenses, enabling the District to forecast its needs and allocate funds effectively across various departments and programs.

Several Board members offered written comments and suggestions prior to the meeting. Director Trent Colbert submitted “I have edited the budget directive to both cut and reallocate, so that we can better plan how to go to the voters with the least tax impact necessary, while improving our ability to run the district, maintain teaching excellence for all, and maintain our infrastructure. The main theme is to put specific measurable goals to the budget document that reflect the funding priorities at this time, and a reorganization of how we manage spending on maintenance.”

Director Christy Martinez wrote, “I have concerns about the vague nature of the directive. I understand that the directive is not intended to be a breakdown of specific planned purchases, but I am hoping to see a bit more specificity in terms of how the money will be spent. For example, when we say we want to prioritize “Academic Gap-Closing Programs for Marginalized and Underrepresented Groups” what does that mean in terms of spending? What does that look like? Are there specific programs we are considering?”

Director Katie Kaufmann offered, “I am largely in support of the budget directive as it currently stands. I could say specific things about my desire for the district to maintain a commitment to using an equity lens, to prioritize programming to close academic gaps, and provide critical wrap-around services that have become even more important in the years following COVID closures. Instead I'll boil it down to this: the directive conveys a commitment to the Strategic Plan and the efforts that are becoming more codified in the district to use data at the student, classroom, grade level, and building level to direct resources of time, attention and money which I completely support. I appreciate that this budget directive, in contrast to the Budget Directive approved in April 2024, is more inclusive of needs and priorities, reading more like a budget mission statement than a list of specific actions. Keeping it at this high level allows our leaders working directly with staff and students to make specific recommendations and prioritize from a closer understanding of the realities on the ground.”

On the matter of the District's fund balance, there was disagreement. Mr. Colbert stated, “I think 35% is a good compromise as it represents about \$10 million in our savings account to buffer any extreme unforeseen needs.” But Board Secretary Linda Robinson wrote that the District should “do what needs to be done to maintain a 30% fund balance.” Ms. Kaufmann echoed with “a 30% fund balance, as proposed by the administration, is appropriate. It serves its purpose: providing a bridge for the district's expenses from June to December while we wait for the major influx of local tax dollars in January. It also offers a cushion to respond to unexpected events.”



Maplewood Richmond Heights School District

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Dr. Bonita Jamison, Superintendent • Dr. Shonda Ambers-Phillips, Assistant Superintendent • Dr. Chris McGee, Assistant Superintendent

Ultimately, Board members voted to adopt the [version proffered by Ms. Kaufmann](#), with revised language stating that the fund balance should be “at least” 30%.

In other business, Board members also studied proposed language for possible ballot issues in the April 8, 2025 municipal election. The DRAFT language under review is as follows:

Bond issue:

Shall the Board of Education of the School District of Maplewood Richmond Heights, St. Louis County, Missouri borrow money in the amount of \$15,000,000 for the purpose of acquiring, constructing, renovating, improving, furnishing and equipping school sites, buildings and related facilities, including facilities upkeep, safety improvements and track and field renovations, and issue general obligation bonds for the payment thereof? If this proposition is approved, the current debt service levy of the school district is expected to decrease from \$1.35 to \$0.85 per one hundred dollars of assessed valuation of real and personal property.

Tax issue:

Shall the Board of Education of the School District of Maplewood Richmond Heights, St. Louis County, Missouri, be authorized to increase the operating tax levy of the District by \$0.50 per \$100 of assessed valuation for paying general operating expenses, including salaries and benefits to develop and retain teachers, resulting in the adjusted operating levy of the school district per \$100 of assessed valuation to be estimated at \$4.0173 for residential real property, \$4.4767 for commercial real property, and \$5.9658 for personal property?

Next steps in the process include scheduling town halls to engage the community, presenting the ballot measures to the Board for approval in January and submitting ballot language to the St. Louis County Board of Elections by January 28, 2025.

Federal Programs Coordinator Dr. Stephanie Bechard and ECC Principal Tanisha Staniel teamed up for a presentation on proposed increases in tuition for the Discover Club and Preschool programs. The Board will vote in January on the following proposals:

- Discover Club - Increase Discover Club tuition 20% for the 2025-2026 school year and increase the Discover Club registration fee from \$35 to \$50
- PreSchool - a projected 20% increase in tuition.

The next meeting of the MRH Board of Education will take place on January 16, 2025.